

CLAIMANTS UNITE

CLAIMANTS NEWSPAPER (No 9)



Gossips Given GoAhead to Grass

MALICIOUS GOSSIPMONGERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN AN OFFICIAL GO-AHEAD TO GRASS ON CLAIMANTS. One of the results of Derek Deevy's SS fraud of £36,000 was the headline in the Daily Mirror "SPY ON THE SCROUNGERS!" The article quoted Social Security Ministry Stanley Orme as saying, "The public can help catch the dole scroungers". He went on to ask people to tip off the Department's fraud staff about possible swindles and promised that every allegation would be followed up.

The SS already have a special central unit to deal with "fraud" with 500 specialist staff at a local level. These "highly trained" men and women produced 15,000 convictions last year. That is less than 0.1% of claimants "fiddling" while the rest suffer late payments at best and all sorts of harassment at worst and all women claimants live in fear in case someone reports them for cohabitation.

Single parents have long experience of neighbours grassing on them - usually for no reason. A claimant from Barnet writes:

"I am a divorcee of two years standing, have three daughters and live in a two bedroomed council house. I have a boyfriend who lives in the same road. I am dependant on Social Security as my only source of income and because of this I am the subject of malicious gossip from neighbours who have been writing letters, both signed and anonymous to the SS accusing me of cohabiting. cont p.2.



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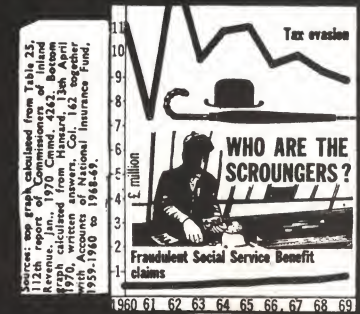
"An SS representative came to my house one evening last November asking personal questions, probing into our private affairs and threatening me with court action on the basis of three signed letters received from my neighbours, threatening the SS with national press coverage if they did not pursue the matter further, ie. stop my allowance.

"In an effort to try and disprove the allegations it was necessary to permit him to view my bedroom and bathroom. He seemed to think that my boyfriend's clothes and shaving gear may be in my house. He stated he did not believe me and in a further effort to convince him my boyfriend took him to his house, showed him the above items and a receipt from the Electricity Board who had awoken him at 7.30 am that morning to read his meter. Undoubtedly without the latter piece of evidence being available I feel sure I would have lost my allowance.

"This is not the first time I have been harassed by the SS as two years ago I underwent the same humiliating treatment. I am not prepared to undertake further harassment and humiliation."



**join the
CLAIMANTS
UNION**



And it is not just the lace curtain gossips who cause trouble. On the same day that Derek Deevy was sent down for six years, Brent CU heard of a similar case where a woman had her books confiscated, but this time it was a boyfriend who told the SS. Angry because they had split up, he deliberately lied to the SS to get his own back.

No one should have to put up with this harassment and humiliation. No one should be open to moral blackmail of this kind.

It is only because the system is so complex and benefits so meagre that some claimants defraud the system. And it must be pointed out that whilst there may be a very small number of large scale fiddles, most fraud "cases" are minor affairs provoked by the SS themselves. The only way to stop fraud is to increase benefits, to make them easier to claim by cutting out the complicated bureaucratic machinery and by ending those rules such as the cohabitation rule which depend on moral value judgements.

*** HURRY! HURRY! ***
GET YOUR CLAIMANTS UNION T-SHIRT NOW
White with red CU crest - price £1 inc. p&p. from East London CU, Dame Colet House, Ben Jonson Road, London E1.

JUST LEFT SCHOOL?

Make sure to get CLAIMANTS UNITE No. 10 for special SCHOOLLEAVERS GUIDE TO SURVIVAL.

Unite Against Racist Lies

KEEP RACIST PROPAGANDA AWAY FROM THE DOLE QUEUES!

Unemployment is caused by the Government, not by black or Asian workers. Racist scum are making the most of the economic crisis to incite and divide the working class. They exploit the unemployment figures by telling the unemployed that there would be jobs for all if the blacks went home. The Government and the bosses let the racists get away with it - if the working class is divided and black workers used as scapegoats then it can get on with carrying out its attacks on our living standards without united opposition.

Black workers are being blamed for something which is nothing to do with them. When the bosses needed extra labour they imported it - now they don't need it they're casting it aside. Bosses don't care what colour the labour force is as long as it can be exploited. They use racism and fascism to divide and smash the labour movement.

The cancer of racism is spreading. In East London a Bengali family were forceably prevented from moving into a GLC flat by National Front members who threw their furniture down the stairs and incited occupants of other flats on the estate to support their action. The police said they couldn't control the situation (!) and threatened to arrest local squatters and claimants who complained. Incidents like this are becoming commonplace. Racists feed on irrational prejudices to gain support - "they smell, they eat strange food, they steal our jobs and our houses". No mention is ever made of how the capitalist bosses, in the name of British imperialism, invaded their lands and exploited their labour.

The vermin who use racist propaganda to gain support and votes for organisations such as the National Front, National Party, British Movement, etc, are fascists, just like Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. They talk of repatriating black immigrants. Where to? Brixton, Southall, Bradford? Before he gained power, Hitler talked of deporting all the Jews to Madagascar, Madagascar soon became Auschwitz.

Fascists need to build a mass movement in order to gain power. They despise the working class but cannot gain power without its support. Therefore, they pretend to care about others and try to get involved in community work, eg. helping claimants. John Roberts, the NF candidate at the recent Thurrock by-election, gleefully told a Guardian reporter that the SS had left to action at the mention of his name when he rang them up to get a claim sorted out for a constituent. Of course, many well-known fascists have first-hand experience of claiming. Kingsley Read, leader of the National Party and a Blackburn councillor, is unemployed himself. But this does not mean he identifies with the unemployed or the rest of the working class. He objected to council plans to build a block of flats near his home as he "did not want to live near peasants".

CU members talk to fellow claimants every day - at the SS and the dole. We are in a position to counter racist lies and offer constructive alternatives. We must not allow fascists to use the dole queues to gain support.

At the last NFCU conference a resolution was passed opposing racism and fascism, and recommending that local unions should ban all members of the various fascist political organisations from CU activity.



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Letter from America

THE ONLY US GROUPS WITH MUCH IN COMMON WITH THE CLAIMANTS UNION ARE THE "UNEMPLOYED & WELFARE COUNCILS" PROMOTED BY THE "INTERNATIONAL WORKERS PARTY". APART FROM WORKING IN THE BENEFIT CLAIMANTS FIELD, THEY ALSO ECHO SOME OF OUR ATTITUDES TO 'USEFUL WORK' ('THE RIGHT TO WORK' IS A NON-STARTER IN THE US - IT IS THE RIGHT-WING SLOGAN USED TO BREAK STRIKES!) THE IWP IS A MUCH TINIER OUTFIT THAN OURS, IN A COUNTRY SIX TIMES LARGER.

Their last journal *The Struggle* goes into detail about Welfare Struggles in the US, in the past and now, and the problems of "organising the unorganised" (In the US, only one-fifth of the workforce are in Trade Unions, which anyway resemble huge Labour Corporations rather than TUs as we know them.) *The Struggle* tells the story of the US NATIONAL WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANISATION. This was a very militant and popular organisation: in its initial heyday between 1966 and 1968 its mass support was much greater than the CU. But the next four years were spent in death throes, and now it has sunk without a trace. What went wrong? The article lists a number of weaknesses, most of which, I am glad to say, we are avoiding in the CU.

Firstly, NWRO relied heavily on a wealthy and professional central bureaucracy, whose finance can be directly traced to the Federal "Anti-Poverty" programme. Once these funds were stopped by the politicians, the organisation collapsed. The "professionals'" commitment stopped when their salaries stopped. Independent financing by members' subscriptions and efforts is vital to a mass movement.

Secondly, they threw all their efforts into winning discretionary grants and legal cases, which they did very well, better than we do.

But when the grants policy tightened, there was nothing to be won. MOST IMPORTANTLY - there was NO POLITICAL DIRECTION at all, apart from a reformist aim of a higher guaranteed income, and certainly no socialist politics. Had the movement defined its aims as the achievement of a socialist society, it would still be kept going by committed socialists, and the Welfare recipients would still have a force to defend and advocate their interests, albeit a weaker one. 'Militancy' is not the point: a throng of angry women would stand outside a Welfare Office, say prayers, shout "hallelulah", and then move in and reduce the office to firewood.

Those who argue that the clearly revolutionary socialist position taken by the NFCU is "driving people away" are being very short-sighted. Without it, the CU would walk right off the map.

.....& Europe

The two main kindred organisations in France are the CLH (Ctte for the Struggle of the Handicapped) 7 rue de Cambrai, 75019 Paris and the CFDT (Comite de Chomeurs - Unemployed Ctte) of rue de la Prefecture, Tours.

The CLH are a militant and very socialist wheel-chair brigade whose journal is "HANDICAPES MECHANTS". The handicapped have to fight a right pig of a social services system. Means tests are severe and complicated. Charities abound. One of CLH's activities is to campaign against street collections for the handicapped, urging people not to give, smashing down collecting tins and occupying the charity HQs. They are currently campaigning against sheltered workshops ("workshops from which the able-bodied are excluded"), "internment" of mental patients, and did their bit against the Springbok tour of France. The CLH also lay stress on another important issue - the suppression of the sexuality of handicapped people.



E WORLD UNITE!

Lastly, having no socialist viewpoint, they fell into the error of thinking "the poor" were in some ways economically and socially separate in interests from the rest of the working class. They built no links, nor identified with, the struggles of organised labour. The NWRO was left without material or moral support when they really needed it. Thank god this philosophy has died a death in the CU, because IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THE CU MOVEMENT IS GOING OR WHAT IT IS DOING, EXCEPT AS PART OF THE LABOUR AND SOCIALIST MOVEMENT.

We have always stressed these links - the Strikers Handbook, of which 20,000 are in circulation, is our main tool for this. And it looks as though it will pass the acid test - that the TU movement will pay for its reprinting and revision. However, I do think we have fallen down on this task, and missed many opportunities. This is because, like all propaganda jobs, they do not press themselves as immediate tasks to be done: selling

The CFDT Unemployed Committee is a trade union branch, publishing a very informative bulletin. The text of the Claimants Union 'Fight to Live' campaign leaflet was printed in a recent issue. Their current campaign is for 'freedom of expression' in the Labour Exchanges, that is, the authorities are trying to stop the committee operating.

Oh - and just one final word - about Germany. There is a myth going round about how generous the British SS is compared to "hard working countries" like Germany. My latest information about Germany is that unemployment benefits are much higher, and means tests are much less severe. A wife is still entitled to non-contributory unemployment benefit even if the husband is working full time. Family allowances are twice or three times the rate in Britain. The 'cohabitation rule' for widows' pensions has been abolished, and this has led to a spate of divorces among re-married widows, in order to restore entitlement to benefit.

Our foreign correspondent

literature, visiting TU branches, strikes, pickets, Trades Councils, etc, and the CU activists have quite enough to do anyway. If we don't sow seeds, we don't reap later. But local CU groups generally blench at the thought of spending hard-earned funds on wooing this sort of support.

The Struggle also outlines the work of the Unemployed & Welfare Councils in San Francisco and New York:

FOOD STAMPS: when these originally came in (like EEC butter and beef tokens) they could be seen as an insulting piece of means testing. But they became essential to low income budgets, and suddenly the US Government has decided to stop them (for 5million people). So the campaign is to keep the stamps! I SHUDDER TO THINK - BUT ONE DAY WE COULD BE FIGHTING TO KEEP FIS!! UGH!



"HANDOUTS WILL ONLY DESTROY YOUR INCENTIVE TO WORK..."



UNEMPLOYED 90-DAY CUT-OFF RULE: Like the old "four week rule" of the SS, this rule is designed to throw people onto the low-wage market. The Councils fight against these cut-offs, and also do campaign issues such as hospital closures, and exploitation of home-workers. The only thing that bothers me is that the UWC and the IWP seem quite interchangeable, a bit like IS Right to Work committees. The problem about tying an organisation to a political party is that it is subject to the whims and priorities of the party, and can be folded at will. Now it seems to me that the IWP's main idea, that a "thrust to organise the unorganised" is the main task, may well prove disillusioning, and harder going than they think. THE CU HAS NOT ONLY A SOCIALIST POLITICS, BUT A QUITE INDEPENDANT ONE which has found us at loggerheads with every group and party at one time or another.



BEHIND THE WIRE

Last Monday a claimant in East London was insulted and harassed so much by the SS that she smashed every window in West India Dock Road SS office.

An electric cooker on HP was the original cause of the trouble. The SS refused to pay the instalments on the cooker last November so by the beginning of July the HP firm was threatening to repossess it unless the claimant, an unsupported mother with three small children, paid £50 within two weeks. She knew that the SS would have to provide her with a reconditioned cooker if hers was repossessed but, naturally enough, she preferred to try to keep her brand new one. So she used two weeks money to pay off the HP firm which meant that she had no money left for food.

So - off she went to the SS to tell them she was destitute and to ask for an emergency payment. At first she was offered a food voucher which she was going to accept but first of all the clerk wanted her books back. Once she'd handed them over, he said, "From now on you won't be getting your books back. You'll have to come down here every Monday." When she swore at him in amazement, he took the food voucher away and told her to get out. She got out and proceeded to smash every window in the building. The long arm of the law in the person of a plain clothes SS cop appeared and she was arrested and taken to the police station. She wasn't charged but told to come back four days later to find out if she was going to be.

Naturally enough, the SS didn't consider it necessary to post the food voucher to her.

THE STAFF IN SS OFFICES OFTEN HAVE TO PUT UP WITH EVEN WORSE CONDITIONS THAN THE CLAIMANTS - AND THEY HAVE TO BE THERE EVERY DAY. THIS LETTER WAS PRINTED IN THE SOUTH LONDON PRESS ON FRIDAY 16 JULY. WE FELT IT WAS WORTH REPRINTING:

"As Secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association's branch to which clerical workers in Brixton Social Security Office belong, and as someone who has worked in the office for over five years, I feel it necessary to reply to the article in last Friday's South London Press.

"The article says that in response to complaints by claimants about the condition of the office - a point of view wholeheartedly shared by our members working in the Brixton office - the Supplementary Benefits Commission chairman states the situation leaves a lot to be desired.

"Our members would gladly tell anyone that not only is a lot to be desired but a lot is to be desired on the part of the DHSS management in doing something about the problem.

"On virtually every aspect of this office - cleaning, heating in the winter, ventilation in the summer, adequate conditions for claimants and staff - we as trade unionists have had to take industrial action before anything has been done.

"Our members do not deliberately wish to deprive claimants of their benefits, which many of us consider far too low, but we have been left with no choice because of the management's attitude.

"Our members are being asked to accept a reduction in pay to move to a new Streatham office because the site of the office is a few hundred yards outside the Inner London Weighting boundary."

MIKE DUGGAN, AREA BRANCH SECRETARY, CPSA.

Unemployed Fight Fascism

Today the number of registered unemployed stands at 1½ million, the highest since the war. And the government admits that this figure is not going to go down for some time. This is a direct consequence of the present capitalist crisis and along with all the cuts in social spending is a direct attack by the government to offload this crisis onto the backs of the working class.

The Labour government's refusal to attempt any real socialist policies has left a vacuum. Its failures have caused disillusionment among its traditional supporters some of whom have joined with right wing elements in rejecting working class organisation in favour of the pseudo-socialist propaganda and the "firm political stance" of fascist parties. It is no surprise that the National Front has a welfare rights organiser and that in the Thurrock by-election great play was made by the Front candidate of his ability to sort out people's SS problems. "Fascism not only inflames prejudices that are deeply ingrained in the masses but also plays on the better sentiments of the masses, on their sense of justice and sometimes even on their revolutionary traditions." It is a mistake to just take the Front's racist views as a basis for our struggle against fascism: it is obvious that these racist views do express the real discontent of many people. We have to start attacking these views at source by pointing out the real causes of people's dissatisfaction.

To make their policy succeed the government has been forced to spread the lie that unemployment is being caused by too high wages and a lack of money for investment. This is obviously false. Unemployment is caused by the very nature of capitalism itself. Under this system we are treated as mere 'units of production' to be discarded at will whenever we are no longer able to make superprofits for the bosses. But the system also requires a pool of labour to draw on when there is a boom in the market.

This pool of labour gets larger or smaller with the needs of capitalism but never disappears. The threat of unemployment is used to cause competition between workers and as a disciplinary measure in order to keep wages down and conditions bad.

This is why we are treated so badly on the SS. Through previous struggles by the labour movement we have gained the right to some benefits but these are only just enough to keep us alive and we will always have to fight just to maintain them.

There are 350,000 students who have just left school. Maybe a third of these will be joining the dole queues on a permanent basis: there are still lots left there from last year. Having just spent the past ten years being alienated by the schooling process they will be prime targets for recruitment by the fascists. CU members must be to the fore in the fight to prevent this.

On a broader front, we have to fight those actions of the government like the Immigration Acts and the Prevention of Terrorism Act which are preparing the way for fascism. These repressive laws not only set the framework for a fascist state but also give a great boost to the growing fascist movement we are already facing.

Greg

Dear Claimants Unite,

In response to your article on "Power not Participation" surely neither the CPSA nor we as claimants have any "rights" to participation. Surely what we should be fighting for is control of the social services systems by the working class as a whole. Only by this means will we be able to end the divisions which have been manufactured between claimants and other members of the working class.

A Delany

SOCIAL SECURITY RATES

SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT SCALE RATES

HOUSEHOLDERS	short term	long term
Couple	£17.75	£21.55
Single	£10.90	£13.70

NON-HOUSEHOLDERS

Single over 18	£8.70	£11.00
16 - 17	£6.70	

Children

13 - 15	£5.60
11 - 12	£4.60
5 - 10	£3.75
under 5	£3.10

PLUS A RENT ADDITION

- 1) rent and rates in full
- 2) mortgage interest, plus an amount for insurance and repairs etc.
- 3) £1 rent allowance if you are a non-householder

ARE YOU GETTING THE RIGHT AMOUNT?
YOUR LOCAL CU WILL MAKE SURE YOU DO.

UNEMPLOYMENT & SICKNESS BENEFIT RATES

Single person	£11.10
Wife's addition	£6.90
Married woman	£7.80
First child	£3.50
Each extra child	£2.00

RETIREMENT PENSIONS

Single person	£13.30
Wife's addition	£7.90

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE ENTITLED TO AND HOW TO CLAIM IT SEE THE CLAIMANTS UNION GUIDEBOOK AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL CU OR YOUR NEAREST REGIONAL COORDINATING UNION PRICED 75p (30p to claimants). PLENTY OF OTHER LITERATURE, BADGES, STICKERS, POSTERS, ETC. AVAILABLE. BUY NOW WHILE STOCKS LAST.

WE DO NOT HAVE A CENTRALISED LEADERSHIP, BUT CUs BELOW ACT AS COORDINATORS FOR THEIR REGIONS. ADDRESSES, PUBLICATIONS AND GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CU MOVEMENT CAN BE OBTAINED BY WRITING, PHONING OR BETTER STILL GOING TO SEE THEM:

MIDLANDS
44 Havelock Road
Birmingham 20
(also address for
Publications Library)

CYMRU/WALES
SWANSEA CU
79 Brookesby Road
Bon-y-maen, Swansea

SOUTH WEST
Bristol CU
54 Richmond Road
Montpelier, Bristol 6
(0272-422310)

NORTH THAMES
East London CU
Dame Colet House
Ben Johnson Road, London E1
(01-790-3867)

NORTH
South Shields CU
Peoples Place
Derby Terrace, South
Shields (08943-65062)

NFCU PRESS OFFICERS
01-609-0710
01-735-6123

SOUTH THAMES
Camberwell CU
Union Place
122 Vassall Road, London SW9
(01-735-6123)

NORTH WEST
(contact address only)
6 Cotswold Drive
Horwich, Lancs.

WEST THAMES
West London CU
510 Harrow Road
London W10
(01-969-7437)

NEWSPAPER
C/O Camberwell CU

YOUR LOCAL CU IS :

NAME.....
ADDRESS.....
MEETING: DAY.....TIME.....



DEADLINE FOR CLAIMANTS UNITE No. 10 -
WEDNESDAY 1st September.
PLEASE SEND ARTICLES, NEWS, PHOTOS,
CARTOONS, etc, to Camberwell CU.